

Delaying dementia: VR games may be the next big thing

May 25 2022, by Hunter Boyce, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



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While virtual reality may once have seemed like something out of "Back to the Future," the technology is now here to stay. A new report by CNET claims the gaming platform may even be older adults' next super

weapon in the fight against dementia.

From the Oculus Rift to PlayStation VR, [virtual reality](#) gaming is growing. Now studies are showing that playing some of the platform's biggest hits, like "Beat Saber" and "Superhot," may slow the development and progression of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. It all has to do with simultaneously exercising the mind and body.

In 2021, over 600 individuals were surveyed to study the impact of virtual reality gaming during the pandemic. The results of the study were ultimately published by Health and Technology.

"Providing the population with the means to engage with VR activities to keep them occupied and physically fit could be a promising strategy to minimize the decline in mental and physical well-being that has been reported in many instances since the start of the pandemic," the study concluded.

A [systematic review](#) published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* examined 15 peer-reviewed studies on the effects of virtual reality.

"Of the 12 articles examining physiological outcomes, eight showed a positive effect on physical fitness, [muscle strength](#), balance, and extremity function," the review said. "Only four articles examined the effects on psychological outcomes, three showed positive effects such that VR exercise could ease fatigue, tension, and depression and induce calmness and enhance quality of life."

The review did however note that the 15 studies used "far from ideal" sample sizes and therefore suggested more rigorous studies be performed to confirm the findings.

Adult and geriatric psychiatrist and director of the Brain Health Center, Dr. David A. Merrill told CNET that "exergaming"—exercise gaming—has had a positive effect among older adults at her memory clinic.

"We're hoping that by having the exergaming experience at the brain gym they'll take this into real life by increasing activities like gardening, dancing, walking, socializing with friends, or even doing recumbent biking at home while listening to podcasts," she said. "We're seeing that exergaming helps people get an appreciation of the potential benefits of healthy lifestyle habits."

While the research points to a possibility of VR gaming being a great tool for [older adults](#) looking to delay dementia, the studies are still ongoing. More rigorous tests still need to be taken. For now, however, the findings are pointing in a healthy direction.

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Citation: Delaying dementia: VR games may be the next big thing (2022, May 25) retrieved 12 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-05-dementia-vr-games-big.html>

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